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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a memorandum written to the chairman of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois concerning the author's experiences teaching three undergraduate teacher education courses. The paper describes some of the difficulties and failures of this teaching experience and conveys general impressions of the school's undergraduate teacher education program in early childhood education, offering suggestions for its future. Areas covered in the discussion include impressions of students and specific problems with the author's teaching of the courses "Parent Involvement Techniques for Teachers" and "Principles of Practice in Early Childhood Education." Problems included an apparent lack of interest by students in theoretical versus methods-oriented course content (for example, understanding the distinction between teaching and mothering versus learning how to prepare parent newsletters), student discomfort with the author's informal, intellectually-oriented teaching style (as opposed to assigning and testing on specific page numbers in the textbook), and clashes between course content and practicum experiences in local schools. The paper raises the possibility that within-department differences may contribute to these problems, but acknowledges the difficulty inherent in providing students with an understanding of various teaching ideologies while presenting a coherent theme. The paper also covers the possibility that the courses students now find unhelpful may be reconsidered once they gain teaching experience. The paper also touches on the role of graduate teaching assistants and offers a concise summary of the described dilemmas and instructional possibilities raised by their teaching experience. (EV)

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# Confession of a Teacher Educator

## Memorandum to the Department Chairman

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# Confession of a Teacher Educator[1]

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As the academic year comes to a close I feel the need to confess some of the difficulties and failures I experienced attempting to teach undergraduates for the first time in nineteen years! In the process of confession, I also want to convey my general impressions of our undergraduate teacher education program in early childhood education, and to offer some suggestions for its future.

As you know, I volunteered to teach three undergraduate courses when one of our colleagues went on leave. My motive was not only to help the department chair (recalling what it was like when I was in that chair!), but also because I assumed that it would be an instructive experience for me, given my continuing interest in teacher education as a field of study.

Overall I found the experience humbling, frustrating, puzzling and indeed, instructive! While it may have caused damage to my self-esteem as a teacher - a matter of great importance to me - I hope that some of the discussion that follows will be useful as we discuss revision and reform of teacher education in our college.

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[1] This paper is based on a memorandum prepared for the chairman of the department in which the courses were offered.

**Impressions of the Students**

It is my impression that our students in the early childhood education preservice program vary considerably in intellectual ability. Some are quite weak, and a few very strong. My rough guess is that the latter group - only about 15% of the whole - measure up to the high ability the Holmes group has been urging us to recruit. But I did not get the impression that they were especially eager to arrive in the trenches and launch careers in the city schools of our state or nation.

**Problems with my Teaching**

The three courses I taught could and certainly should have been of better pedagogical and intellectual quality. I realize that these classes have been taught by others successfully for several years. However, a number of factors might be considered in trying to understand why my own efforts were so flawed.

**Parent Involvement Techniques for Teachers**

This course probably should not be offered for a whole semester undergraduate (3 hour) **pre**-service course. First, the relevant content seems too thin; the *knowledge base* of direct relevance seems quite small. The available literature could probably be covered adequately in about 8 or 10 hours of class time. Second, the actual *techniques* of potential practical value for working with parents seem difficult, if not impossible for undergraduates to learn: **maybe some things cannot be learned in advance of their felt need!** I would recommend inserting these 8 or 10 hours into the Principles and Practices of Early Childhood Education course, dropping the Parent Involvement course for undergraduates, and offering it periodically as a full sememster course for inservice teachers in our graduate degree programs.

Aside from problems of identifying worthwhile and

interesting content for undergraduates[2], there were also pedagogical problems. For example, when I attempted to use role-play techniques to rehearse and explore ways of coping with parent-teacher confrontations, the students - as they pointed out rather pointedly - were unable to identify adequately with either the parents' perspectives or the teachers' predicaments!

The initial attempts at role-playing flopped miserably! But perhaps I abandoned role-play techniques too quickly. I really don't know, and wouldn't know what to do if - heaven forbid - I had to teach undergraduates again! How could I find out what to do?

In addition to the reading and role-play efforts, all students were asked to identify a contentious home-school issue of interest and to construct an interview about it to conduct with a few teachers and a few parents. (This has always been a successful feature of the School-Parent Relations graduate course offered for teachers.) Several hours were devoted to learning how to construct interviews, (e.g.) question phrasing, how to conduct them, and some practice time as well.

But while a few students indicated that conducting interviews was interesting, most described them as a waste of time. Perhaps the value of this exercise will become apparent to them later in "feed forward" fashion. In other words, students might evaluate these experiences differently in retrospect. They might look back on the interviews several years from now and acknowledge that while they were conducting the interviews they seemed to be a waste of time. However, in retrospect they might be glad to have had practice in how to respond to a contentious parent and can see ways in which the preservice experience useful after all. Reaching for straws, you say? Perhaps!

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[2] In the decade since this paper was written that content and research base in the field of school-parent relations and related issues has grown considerable. How meaningful it might be to undergraduates is another issue.

Somewhat more puzzling to me were students' responses to my own work on the distinctions between mothering and teaching (Katz, 1984[3]). I saw this set of ideas as the central conceptual organizer of the course. It describes the role distinctions and special characteristics of family versus professional relationships, and includes an implied set of principles of practice for teachers. The ideas have always been well received whenever I have presented them around the country and elsewhere! They are invariably welcomed by audiences of experienced teachers and parents. I frequently meet colleagues on my travels who report using the article or tapes of presentations on these ideas for staff meetings, parent workshops, grad classes, and so forth. This work is widely reprinted in the U.S., Canada, and Australia and translated into French and Chinese! **But I could not engage our undergraduates either in the ideas or the related principles of practice:** neither in class nor on the final exam! And I am puzzled by this poor response.

I wondered occasionally (in connection with this topic as well as some others) whether coverage of the same content in an undergraduate course given in another department (e.g. human development) with another title (e.g. child development or family studies) would have yielded more positive responses. My tentative hypothesis is that when a course is identified and announced as a teaching *methods* course, students expect clear procedures and specific prescriptions for action, tips for teaching, and perhaps a minimum of the background reasoning and conceptual material. On the other hand, if courses are billed as 'child development' or 'family relationships' courses, students would not expect the latter; they would look for pages of notes and readings on material examinable in multiple choice fashion! Just an hypothesis, mind you! Another straw?

While principles of practice related to school-

[3] A revised version of the article is published in L. G. Katz, Talks with Teachers of Young Children. A Collection. Ablex Publishing Corp. Stamford, CT. 1995.

parent relations were included in the class discussion, they were perhaps too remote from students' own experience to be internalized as prescriptions or guidelines for practice. A few students said (resentfully!) that they would have liked to learn how to prepare newsletters and how to write notes to send home to parents. Perhaps they were on target. The latter are the kind of behaviors they wanted to practice. But, probably in error, I thought such activities somewhat inappropriate. Why should students pay high tuition fees to attend a great university to learn to do something as relatively simple-minded as how to write notes to parents, I wondered? But I must have been wrong about this. I should have heeded my own advice about the developmental stages of teachers! I'm not sure how I would do it differently if - heaven forbid - I had to do it again! By the way, how is this kind of issue related to the Holmes group's demand for intellectually defensible content in teacher education?

As I think about how this Parent Involvement course fell short of the mark, it is of some small comfort that our colleague who used to teach it told me the course is easier to teach when the proportion of graduate to undergraduate students enrolled in it is fairly large. We had very few graduate students in the class! Three out of the 28!

Incidentally, you may not recall that it was I who first developed this course for graduate students about a dozen years ago. I taught it several times - apparently successfully - to inservice teachers in the master's degree program. Such students often expressed appreciation for the role playing sessions, the opportunity to learn interview design, principles of question phrasing, and techniques for conducting interviews with parents and school officials! About ten years ago the teachers in the class continued meeting to commiserate about their lives as teachers, to support and advise each other on building better relations with parents! But, with the undergrads, I must confess, the course failed appallingly.

**Principles of Practice in Early Childhood Education**

The other early childhood course I taught (with two graduate assistants) offered simultaneously with the practicum course, was somewhat more successful (or less unsuccessful!) than the parent involvement course. I believe this was due partly to the students' participation in the practicum. The experience in the field placements certainly stimulated attention to some of the real predicaments they were facing.

The students responded fairly positively to the requirement to develop proposals for two projects for the children to do, and to implement one of them in the practicum. Even though students seemed to like the assignment, the complexities of implementation related to characteristics of their placement sites were significant factors to contend with.

Namely, because we had 41 students, we could not be discriminating in the selection of practicum sites (mostly day care centers). The extent to which the practices we recommended were discrepant with those observed and applied at the practicum sites was easily 70%! The discrepancies were related to methods of discipline, uses of punishment, the nature of activities provided to the children, etc. I will spare you the painful details. But painful they were! (If child care in our community is typical of the rest of the country, our nation in is big trouble.) Yes, practice makes perfect; but perhaps bad practice makes perfectly bad!

In two or three of the better sites, the ratio of adults to children was inflated by the involvement of specialists from our campus and students from the community college. The conditions in these better sites were such that the gradient of generalization to likely future employment conditions is probably too steep to allow for transfer!

In the roughly 70% discrepant cases (i.e. cases in which field practices were discrepant with those we want our students to use and tried to teach), we were confronted with sticky ethical and pedagogical conflicts. A few examples are

outlined below.

> Should we undermine the students' perceptions of the professional competence of their cooperating teachers?
>
> Should we knowingly, intentionally - if reluctantly- alienate our students from their cooperating teachers?
>
> Should we encourage compliance with current practices?
>
> Whose credibility concerning teaching methods is greater in the eyes of the students: the college instructors' or the practicing teachers'?
>
> Should we disavow the placement site's practices and practitioners and put the students in a difficult bind, or let them acquire the site's largely faulty (and several really bad) practices and hope for the best? Which are the 'least worst errors'?

One of the big issues in teacher education generally, but early childhood particularly, is the extent to which we put our faith in the practicum experiences. Such is the case even though the practices to be learned from actual practitioners are the very ones colleges of education - especially R & D colleges - are supposed to up-grade at best, or ideally, **prevent**! We try to teach our preservice students improved and latest methods, and even though we lack credibility, we may succeed only to have the newer improved methods discredited by the cooperating teachers or discouraged by practicum site norms. Furthermore, if we were to accept into the program only the number of candidates equal to the number of adequate practicum placements available, our program would become too small to be viable!

Surely a major motive of the Holmes Group and Carnegie Reports is to upgrade the quality of current practices in classrooms. But occasionally I wonder about the strident rhetoric, especially from certain national persons, about the importance of getting students out into schools as early as possible. Some even advocate getting schools and teachers to take over much of teacher education. But note that such assertions are very often made by the same speakers who

condemn such teachers for putting the "Nation at Risk"! Where are our leaders' critical thinking skills?

Unfortunately, many of the cooperating teachers in the day care center placements had little or no training. At two sites staff turnover was so great that our student, during a mere seven weeks of practicum, was the most stable adult participant in the class! In one case in particular, our student was the only adult still present in the setting who had been there at the beginning of the seven week period!!

During a fairly spontaneous discussion our students complained - some bitterly - that the informal intellectually-oriented (versus Direct Instruction academically-oriented) methods we emphasized in our class contradicted the methods they have been taught in earlier courses in our own teacher education program. Were they right about this? I suppose students could distort or mis-perceive what they are being taught. I couldn't very well pry from them the content of courses they had already taken. Where exactly would I find out what my colleagues teach in their courses? How much do we know about what each other is teaching? How should I let my colleagues know what I am trying to teach?

Another example of within-department contradictions arose after I summarized for students the accumulating research on the negative effects of rewards on motivation (e.g. the "overjustification effect", the "bonus effect", the work of Deci, Lepper, Maehr, Nicholls, Dweck, etc., etc.,). Again, students pointed out rather petulantly that these ideas contradicted the scripted lessons and direct instruction approach they had been taught earlier in our own program.

As I pointed out above, we asked students to engage children in project work characteristic of what we used to call 'open education,' rather than to use the academic approach (e.g. work sheets, whole group instruction in phonics). Remember, we were helping them learn to teach **2**

through 5 year olds! Of course the two contrasting pedagogies are not mutually exclusive - at least not in the primary grades.

No doubt both direct instruction and project work, and some other approaches should be taught to undergraduates. Perhaps the appropriate learning sequence for undergrads is to learn the scripted lesson or direct instruction techniques **before** learning the progressive or informal project approach. Do we know? Could we find out? We do know that the students took the apparent contradictions in our program to indicate that the department has not "...got its act together...," to quote several of my victims!

Perhaps students' perceptions of what we are teaching are distorted so that they see us as competing and squabbling ideologues rather than as people intent on helping them develop analytical skills through presenting contrasting ideas and approaches. Perhaps we should try to find out more about this and how preservice students deal with being trained to use divergent methods in the short and long term.

This exposure to conflicting ideologies and contradictory messages is part of the "Coherent Theme versus Market Place of Ideas" dilemma of teacher education that Jim Raths pointed out to us. (See L. G. Katz, and J. D. Raths, "Six Dilemmas of Teacher Education." (1992.) It raises some knotty questions. How can and should our department address this dilemma?

- Should we encourage students to learn all competing pedagogical models and select for themselves one that is personally most compatible?

- But if personal compatibility is a sufficient criterion for selecting a pedagogical approach, why should not some students choose "time out" procedures, scripted lessons, etc. if it suits them? How is available evidence to be used? Are all alternative pedagogies really acceptable? To whom? Who decides? And how? On what bases?

- Which is the 'least worst error'? Free choice, eclectic hodgepodge or a coherent doctrine?

Surely we are on intellectually or conceptually better ground than personal predilection? Besides, to suggest to candidates that they should select for themselves from among alternative approaches is, in a sense, to undermine or even abdicate our own professional judgment of what the so-called knowledge base tells us is appropriate. On the other hand, can we advocate our own favorite pedagogy without undermining students' perceptions of the professional judgments of our own departmental colleagues?

Some say we should do more to help candidates identify which cases/predicaments for which each contrasting pedagogical approach is appropriate. Isn't this perhaps expecting too much of inexperienced and often immature preservice undergraduate students? Is it not in fact the case - as I believe Zeichner or Buchmann have shown - that candidates react to this free 'market place' approach that offers a variety of pedagogical wares by dismissing <u>all</u> of us as irrelevant? There is certainly reason to believe that cooperating teachers readily help practicum students to dismiss their college instructors in this way. Perhaps the practicum students and cooperating teachers can form a united front by which to keep the college folk and their conflicting pedagogical approaches at bay!

I believe there are some studies to indicate that students who enter elementary teaching typically are those whose recollections of schooling are favorable and who identify warmly and positively with standard and conventional views of what school teaching is. If so, they are likely to discount the faculty's views and embrace standard practices easily and willingly. If this is so, their time in college is surely abused and the state of the art of early childhood teaching is very difficult to modify through teacher education programs. (This issue is less applicable to the day

care scene since few students will have any recollection of institutional life before they were five years old.)

Somehow this brings to mind the study Jim Raths and I did some time ago that supported the 'minor cause hypothesis' about teacher education. Namely, we found that teacher education is a minor cause of what graduates ultimately do on the job; or perhaps teacher education is a 'major cause', but only of the graduates' minor behavior!

While it may be the case that teacher education contributes very little to the ultimate competence attained by teachers, the issue for us is how can that however small contribution best be done, or at least be done really well? This year of experience suggests to me some of the following considerations:

a) A faculty member responsible for an undergraduate course must be readily available to students, probably on a daily basis, in the office with the door ajar most of the time. He/she should genuinely encourage drop-ins, spontaneous visits, and actively invite individual students who are a source of concern to come in for extensive but informal interaction from time to time. I'm not sure this can be done at an R & D university where scholarly achievement receives the highest rewards.

b) For some time I have been teaching graduate students and teachers the pedagogical principle that whenever we apply a homogeneous treatment (e. g. single teaching method) to a group of learners of diverse abilities, experiences, developmental levels, etc., then by definition, we will have a heterogeneous outcome. While it is true that we want some of the latter, we are mostly concerned about achieving homogeneous outcomes (e.g. all children should have optimum self-confidence, grade level reading skills, etc. etc.,). By (my) definition, homogeneous outcomes require heterogeneous treatments. To cut a long story short, the application of this principle of practice to undergraduate education implies that we have to allocate enough time to get to <u>know</u> the students (versus know <u>about</u> them). It also implies that we have to find out in what pertinent ways they vary so that we can offer appropriate heterogeneous or individual treatments by which to ensure such homogeneous outcomes as the acquisition of relevant and worthwhile knowledge, appropriate skills and desirable dispositions. Such an approach seems to require extensive and regular one-to-one contact with students. Can this be done in our department? In our college? At any truly R & D university? At what costs? To whom?

c) Similarly, for some time now I have been teaching the principle that the greater the informality in the learning environment, the more access the teacher has to information about where the learner is. Furthermore, under conditions of optimum (not maximum) informality the teacher can 'uncover' where the learner is and can therefore presumably make better decisions about what to 'cover'. If I am right about this 'optimum informality principle,' and its applicability to preservice education, then again: faculty members must be in frequent informal contact with students. This and other related principles of teaching **cannot be adequately honored by a faculty member who is otherwise distracted and engaged** - at least not by this one! Until we really address the matter of rewarding instructors for the kind of direct informal engagement with undergraduates that seems to be required for good

undergraduate teaching, all the reform rhetoric will be no more than just that: rhetoric. Surely the Holmes Group must address this issue seriously. At present it seems that on an R & D campus, faculty who attend seriously to the education of undergraduates in preservice teacher education have to do so at the expense of their own academic careers.

d) For several years now I have been explaining to teachers and colleagues all over the country and beyond, the principle of the 'recursive cycle', namely that whatever characteristic behaviors/dispositions etc., we have, the chances are that others respond to us in such a way that we will get more of them! In the case of student or novice teachers - for example in preschools - if they request behavior of young children with insufficient confidence, children resist or challenge them; children's resistance, challenge or non-compliance further undermines the teacher's confidence which further causes her to be more tentative in her approach to the children, which in turn causes more resistance and challenge from them, thus a deteriorating 'recursive cycle' is created. Such a teacher can be counseled to rehearse or even feign confidence in order to break or change the cycle.

My point in referring to the principle of the recursive cycle here is to confess that my year with the undergraduates brought the validity of this principle much too close to home! I approached the undergraduates with great trepidation, the sources of which were insufficient and inadequate advanced preparation, not knowing the students and being out of touch with their age group, sensing some hostility in the group, but <u>most of all,</u> great uncertainty about the appropriateness and usefulness of the knowledge and skills to be covered. Such tentativeness has not been my experience with graduate students (though occasionally and appropriately I have suffered loss of nerve when working in a new country)! By the end of the first month of the year I was clearly in a deteriorating cycle! I believe that the students sensed my uncertainty and anxiety, which made them anxious and irritable, which in turn made my anxiety more acute, and so forth. The fact that some of our colleagues told the students that they were lucky because I was going to be teaching the courses seemed to contribute to their negative reactions to the course! Toward the end I struggled to persuade myself (especially in the principles and practices course), that the material was indeed appropriate, and attempted to present it with somewhat greater confidence. And the class ethos did improve, though there could be other ways to account for that. I confess that while the cycle

did not exactly whiz and whirl into a positive spin, at least further deterioration was forestalled!

e) I think that as a faculty member, to do it right - or at least better - I would have had to give a good slice of my time to building and maintaining congenial relationships with the cooperating teachers and day care center directors. Not only is this a time consuming matter, but the fact that in the majority of cases, my views of appropriate practices diverge considerably from theirs would make the relationship-building processes even more difficult, delicate, and time consuming.

f) Another dilemma we confronted concerned whether to indulge the students' demands with respect to assignments and grades for the courses, or to let them struggle with uncomfortable ambiguity in the hope that some professional dispositions might be strengthened. An example of this dilemma emerged fairly clearly during the first meeting of the Principles and Practices course. As is my custom when teaching graduate courses, I introduced students to the reading list by describing each item in terms of its potential interest to them, indicating specially relevant chapters depending on their individual interests, etc. I pointed out, for example, which books might be most helpful for those interested in day care for infants and toddlers versus preschoolers, those more useful for ideas about math methods, a book with a good discussion about choosing literature for children and so forth. I suggested, as I normally do to graduate students, that it is not necessary to read a whole book, but that it is probably more profitable to scan it first and look for the sections on topics the the individual most wants help with.

Following this detailed introduction, one of the students specifically asked "Which pages should we read?" Again I indicated the relative strengths and weakness of each book and various chapters, etc. But the same student then asked "Which pages will be covered on the exam?" When I said I did not yet know, she asked "How will you know if we've read the pages?" To this I responded by asking "Do you mean you wouldn't read the chapter or book if it is not covered on the exam?" to which the answer was "Yes!" You'll be glad to know I resisted the temptation to point out that perhaps becoming a teacher was not ideally suited to students with such questions! It is painful to acknowledge that the student

behavior described is, in a sense, intelligent and adaptive. It reflects some 14 or 15 years of effective prior socialization into academic (versus intellectual) motivation.

**The feed forward problem**

On several occasions since this particular incident I have recounted it to audiences of inservice teachers. They invariably respond to it with a hearty chuckle. However, after this response I have asked them whether they were the same when they were undergraduates (i. e. reading only what was to be covered on the exams, demanding page numbers, and specifics of how points will be added up for grades). I don't have an actual hand count of how many said they were the same as undergrads, but clearly many recognized themselves in this and similar incidents. The question of interest to me is: What has caused them to change their views and see these undergraduates' behavior amusing? Is there a "feed forward" phenomenon here? That is, even though experience never changes, in <u>retrospective</u> <u>re-evaluation</u> it is given new meaning.

Perhaps the Holmes group is right in advocating that professional studies would be best placed at the fifth year or post-baccalaureate level. And not just for the sake of undistracted liberal arts study, but because perhaps the transformation from being under- to post- graduate is more like a metamorphosis than a gradual or incremental change. Perhaps this is the case at least with respect to dispositions to learn and study. Anyway, it would seem to be worthwhile for our department to examine some of these problems and transformations as we see them in our own students.

As already indicated above, students asked insistently how exams and other assignments were to be graded, and how many points would be awarded per item and assignment. Many exhibited strong anxiety about grades. How I would have loved to grade them on the kind of work they produced that was <u>not</u> graded or required!! How can we induce or strengthen

students' dispositions to go on learning?

In the parent involvement class two students complained angrily that I had broken their "straight A record", and all because the final exam did not test them on what they knew, - only on what they did not know! Incidentally, the B's I gave these two students were gifts! Believe me!

Again, it seems to me that these students' strategies are in a sense adaptive and intelligent. The strategies have obviously been learned and strengthened throughout a long period of schooling. One wonders the extent to which this way of being good at being a student is compatible or incompatible with being good at teaching!

A related dilemma we face is how to treat some of the demands of the students: should instructors of undergraduates address students where they are, indulge their demands (e.g. for exact pages to read) that seem to be characteristic of their developmental stage? Or should we let them struggle with global grading criteria, ambiguous goals and open-ended assignments? Here again, the "feed forward" principle may apply. It may be that students would find the ambiguity painful at the time, but later, in retrospect, might evaluate it as having been useful and having caused them to take some responsibility for their own education. While they might well resent it at the time of the experience, they might appreciate it hind-sightedly, so to speak. Furthermore, our explicit goals include the cultivation and strengthening of students' dispositions to be resourceful, experimental, inventive, and even reflective. How can we do so if we indulge their demands for things like specific page numbers and grading on a point system, etc.? I suppose that either way, we will make errors; and the question is Which errors do we prefer?

**Graduate Teaching Assistants**

In a very real sense the main burden of the practicum and of maintaining communication between instructors, students and

cooperating teachers fell on the shoulders of my two graduate assistants. On too many occasions they had to deal with emergencies on their own. They found it difficult to ascertain the department's policies or procedures for handling student's complaints and questions, and problems with cooperating teachers. We also had difficulty locating the department's norms, guidelines or expectations with respect to evaluating the students' practicum performance. One graduate assistant assigned to another elementary education level practicum course told me that when she reported to the department the practices required by the cooperating teachers of the students she supervised, she was informed (by the department) that nothing could be done because our elementary education program is short of school placements within easy travel of students! What could be done about this very real and practical problem?

Furthermore, I reluctantly confess that an instructor like me--one who is spread far too thinly--also misses many opportunities to help the graduate teaching assistants with their development as teachers of undergraduates. I am sure there were many occasions when the learning of my graduate assistants could have been enhanced and strengthened if I had been more available to them.

It might be important to the process of reform to ask all our graduate teaching assistants to give us their perspectives on the teacher education program, on their roles within it, and their perceptions of the problems to be addressed. I believe we could learn a lot from examining their perspectives on their own and the undergraduates' experience of our program.

It is my impression that both of my teaching assistants gained the respect and confidence of most of the undergraduate students. They visited each of the 41 students in their practicum sites several times, and performed innumerable trouble-shooting duties. One of them was confronted with an undergraduate protesting vehemently that

she did not want to learn to teach and was only stuck in the program because of her father, etc. What could or should a graduate assistant have done about this? Both graduate teaching assistants might have been more comfortable during the occasional unexpected crises if there had been some kind of departmental orientation or training session for them. Both of them were new to this kind of responsibility. The fact that I was also new to the undergraduate practicum only exacerbated the problems. I think the graduate assistants did very well indeed under the circumstances.

The graduate teaching assistants also gained sufficient confidence of most of the students to hear many of their complaints about other parts of our department's program. Among them were: boredom, excessive repetition of material, being treated like children and being 'talked down to', plus the contradictory methods courses mentioned above, the poor quality of the practicum placements - especially the child care centers.

## Summary

In summary, though the experience of trying to teach undergrads was sometimes discouraging and occasionally downright depressing, it was a valuable one. I would like to be involved in thinking through how we can deal with some of these problems more realistically and much more equitably in terms of staff commitment.

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